

BOOK REVIEW

STEVEN FOSTER and REBECCA L. JOHNSON. 2006. **Desk Reference to Nature's Medicine**. (ISBN 0-7922-3666-1, hbk.). National Geographic Books, 1145 17th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20036-4688, U.S.A. (**Orders:** 202-857-7335; <http://shop.nationalgeographic.com/>). \$40.00, 416 pp., 200 color photos, 150 line drawings, 159 maps, 7 5/8" × 9 3/4".

This hefty book is an excellent introduction to medicinal plants for people of all ages. Co-author Steven Foster is a noted medicinal plant expert and photographer. So, it is no wonder that beautiful photographs and clear factual writing grace this collaboration between Foster and *National Geographic* writer and photographer Rebecca L. Johnson. Included are 150 medicinal plants arranged alphabetically by common name. Plants covered include those with common household uses like Aloe (*Aloe vera*), herbal medicines like Saint John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), and plants that are sources of drugs, such as sweet wormwood (*Artemisia annua*), the source of the anti-malarial drug artemisinin. There is even a section devoted to a plant used as a medicine by non-humans. The section on bitterleaf (*Vernonia amygdalina*) describes its use by chimpanzees to rid themselves of parasites. For each plant, the authors include brief botanical descriptions, range maps, Latin names, traditional and current medicinal uses, and information on cultivation and preparation. A sidebar in each section includes interesting tidbits about each plant intended to add to "...a better understanding of human experience with the plant or its relatives." The useful Latin name index includes illustrations of each plant for visual reference. There are also essays that highlight the medicinal plants and ethnobotany of regions from all over the world, including Africa, North America, and the Middle East. Although it is not a comprehensive text book, browsing through this book is an enjoyable way to ground oneself in the basics of phytomedicine and ethnobotany.—*Marissa Oppel, MS, Herbarium Technician, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, Texas 76102-4060, U.S.A.*